

Taking a Firmer Grip on the Wheel

The Commission on Mission, responsible for charting the course of Kyodan activities in evangelism, education, social concerns and ecumenical ministries, took a firmer grip on the wheel and staked out a few immediate goals during a two-day session on May 20-21.

One of the three actions calls for asking United States churches to whom the Kyodan is related to explain their policies with regard to the military chaplaincy and the Central Intelligence Agency. The inquiry grew out of experiences of Japanese pastors located in areas near American bases.

A second action asks the Executive Committee to present to the General Assembly a bill to incorporate more fully into the Commission on Mission representatives from independent organizations, having in mind particularly the Federation of Kyodan Women's Societies.

A motion passed to ask the Evangelism Committee to reassess the readiness of the districts to take a larger share of missionary support, including work funds, when not provided by overseas churches. This action followed several long discussions in which questions were raised about the need for missionaries, and the Rev. Eiichi Akasaka, chairman of the Evangelism Committee, pointed out the previous affirmations of their place by the Commission and by the National Conference of District Evangelism Leaders held in December.

Financial independence, one of the major pillars of the Kyodan policies set in 1966, was a point of reference as members looked at recent trends and future goals.

"What has happened to financial independence?" asked a pastor, noting the amount of money still coming from North America. Some of it is for joint projects like the Joint Broadcasting Committee. Some has been requested for pioneer evangelism, church extension and theological education because the Kyodan itself has not been able to assume the support as was anticipated. Some represent special situations, such as the Kyodan Pastors' Pension Fund.

"We can and must set policies," said one member, "but when there's a gap between our policy and the local situation, it may not in fact be enforceable." More detailed information on funds was requested to facilities study and decisions in the future.

Recognition of decisions and directions set by the 18th General Assembly was called for by the Rev. Kensaku Iwai of Iwakuni. This implies considering at all levels of church life the social needs and responsibility of the church towards them.

The Rev. Tokunaga, Goro, referred in several of his comments to modernization as a key issue and the need to reflect on how North American-Japan mission relations and Japanese congregations themselves are products of the dehumanizing processes of modernization that began with the Meiji era and are still formative in society today.

That relationships with Asian churches must be a major part of future Kyodan policies was reiterated by many voices at many points.

The inheritance of a complicated pattern of overseas relationships was explained: North America relationships are through the Council of Cooperation, the sending of missionaries from Japan is the responsibility of the Committee for Ecumenical Ministries, and relationships with other churches and church agencies are carried on through the office of the General Secretary.

Brainstorming brought suggestions for various structures that would provide more integrated approaches to ecumenical exchanges. The Rev. Kenji Ozaki, chairman of the Committee for Ecumenical Ministries, noted the practical problem of government regulations that often hamper attempts at cooperation within Asia, and also the patience required in changing established practices. Ozaki said the Commission must update the thinking of Japanese Christians, stating that though he had served in Germany as a pastor for a number of years, he is always introduced as an overseas student rather than as a missionary when speaking in Japanese congregations.

THE KYODAN CONFESSION OF FAITH (Part II)

(by Helen Post)

With the adoption of the Confession of Faith by the 1954 General Assembly, the Confession itself ceased to be the subject of debate for some twelve years. It was used when people joined the church and at other times during the church year, depending on the practices of the local churches.

But in the mid-Sixties attention again came to be focussed on it due to the confluence of several events and trends: The Confession of War Responsibility released in 1967, the rising tide of political unrest symbolized by the anti-Expo '70 movement, new currents in Biblical research and theology.

The year 1966, which marked the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Kyodan, stands out as the time when the Kyodan began to be racked by tensions, including the debate over the Confession of Faith.

Confession of War Responsibility

Along with actions taken to chart the future of the Kyodan was one that arose out of the questions young pastors raised at their 1966 summer conference: How can the Kyodan take up the theme of the Church of Tomorrow before it has dealt with the facts of its own history?

Subsequently, the 1966 General Assembly passed a bill authorizing a confession of responsibility in World War II on the part of the Kyodan, and on Easter Sunday in 1967, the Confession of War Responsibility in World War II was sent out, written and signed by Moderator Masahisa Suzuki, with the approval of the Executive Committee.

It immediately drew sharp criticism, as well as expressions of affirmation and support. Some people criticized it for not going far enough in stating what the Kyodan would do to substantiate its repentance. Other critics declared: it was unnecessary; it was an unfair indictment of the wartime leadership of the church; it had not gone through the proper procedures; it was only a personal statement by Suzuki.

While there was no direct relation between the Confession of War Responsibility and the Confession of Faith, it was the Confession of War Responsibility that first reopened the discussion of the place of the Confession of Faith in the Kyodan.

A five-man committee appointed by the Executive Committee in 1967 to review the controversy, noted that there was a positive relationship between the Confession of Faith and the Confession of War Responsibility

in that one dealt with faith and the other with works. At the same time, it noted the danger in equating the two confessions and emphasized their differences. The Confession of Faith had been worked out by theologians for the church-as-a-whole to make; the Confession of War Responsibility was simply a confession written by one man, in which others were invited to join.

But, in the succeeding course of events, some pastors and seminary students and, to a lesser extent, the laity, began to refer to other differences: the Confession of Faith did not deal with the Kyodan's unique historical situation, which the War Responsibility Confession attempted to do; the Confession of Faith was stated in the abstract terms of orthodox Christianity handed down from the past, but the War Responsibility Confession pointed to concrete responsibilities the Kyodan must accept (although, it was agreed, it lacked the ecclesiastical statement that would make it a full confession).

Anti-Expo '70

The debate set off by the Confession of War Responsibility was accelerated by the intense political climate of the pre-70s, and the pressure it brought with regard to the Kyodan's position vis a vis the state. In comparison with the wartime period, the postwar tensions were said to be not over whether the church should be concerned with the church-state issue but how.

These were the years of the pending "renewal" of the U.S.-Japan Mutual Security Treaty, the Vietnam War, the expanding Japanese economy and suspicions of remilitarization, plans for the International Exposition in Osaka in 1970--and anti-government demonstrations among students.

The issue that came to symbolize, for many, the "problems of the 70s" was the Christian Pavilion proposed for Expo '70. The 1968 Kyodan General Assembly had voted to support it; but in the following two years, young pastors and seminary students resorted to a variety of tactics in national meetings, districts, local churches and seminaries in an effort to get the Kyodan to withdraw its support.

Those opposing the Pavilion saw it as a new compromise with the government in its emerging world "power-ism" and declared that such support was a contradiction of the intent of the Kyodan Confession of War Responsibility.

The Confession of Faith was brought into the controversy at at least two points. The Confession became vulnerable, in their opinion, because it did not make clear where the church should stand with regard to the state.

The second point, which emerged in the ensuing struggle, was that a verbal Confession of Faith that is not accompanied by action is meaningless; the only true confession is one in which you "put your life on the line," as some of the protestors felt they were doing.

These points, while sometimes raised in a radical manner were, it developed, held by a larger number within the Kyodan, who were not necessarily in sympathy with the particular methods of protest used, nor with some of the ideological and theological positions professed.

The new discussions of the Confession of Faith were taking place in a theological climate quite different from that which prevailed when the Kyodan was formed in 1941 or when the Confession of Faith was adopted in 1954. In his summation of the Kyodan situation in 1970, Moderator Mitsuho Yoshida spoke of "the problems raised by new approaches to Jesus or influenced by modern hermeneutics and theologies." Pastors once largely under the influence of Barth and Puritanism were reading Bultmann, Neibuhr, Gollwitzer, plus new Japanese thinkers like Tagawa and Yagi.

The discussions often failed to reach a deep theological level, and there were feelings that the Confession of Faith came to be used as a means of avoiding the issue raised by Expo '70.

An issue was made of the "God-is-absent-from-the-world" and *Iesukyo* (the human Jesus) positions held by a small number of the considerably larger group deeply concerned with the church-state issues.

"KOKORO NO TOMO" PROGRAM c e n s o r e d

A pastor's reply to the question, "How come Christian pastors in Korea have been arrested?" on the "Kokoro no Tomo" program was banned from the airwaves on May 19, with the explanation that that topic can't be dealt with.

The April 21 program had featured the Rev. Seinosuke Oshio, chairman of the Kyodan's Special Committee on Korea-Japan Relations, as guest on the Wednesday night Interview Corner. Following the broadcast, the short-wave station advised the Joint Broadcasting Committee, sponsor of the "Kokoro no Tomo" show, that, if it dealt with the subject again there would have to be changes in the script and the speaker.

A second point of confrontation became that of "justification of faith" versus "justification by works," ascribed to the anti-Expo movement.

In 1969 the Faith and Order Commission was asked to study the existing controversy in an effort to understand how, in the Kyodan, which claimed to be a church that stands on the Confession of Faith, in reality there seemed to be Kyodan members and pastors who denied the Confession. The Commission's view, reported after its study, was that "there is room for interpretation with regard to the Confession but not for wide deviation from it."

Two basic issues stand out in the controversy: the content of the Confession; and its authority within the church.

In the case of the content, there are many who reaffirm its literal meaning, with a new sense of conviction borne of the debates. Others uphold it in its historical sense. Still others feel a confession of faith should more clearly relate the church to the historical situation in which it is placed.

The second question, that of the authority of the Confession, revolves around the extent to which it is taken to be the norm or is interpreted as having binding power.

Given the committee system of the Kyodan, the controversy might have continued at the level of discussion and debate had it not been for the decisions that must be made each year as to who is qualified to become a Kyodan minister, for the ministerial examination includes questions to the candidate on the Confession of Faith. From what position will the Commission members judge a candidate's reply and therefore his qualifications to be a Kyodan minister?

(The next issue will take up how the Ministerial Qualifications Commission tried to deal with this issue.)

The station referred to its mission: to treat political, religious and foreign affairs from an impartial standpoint; to ask for a substitute program when their broadcast check reveals a problem; to take seriously the fact that their shortwave broadcasts are heard overseas.

Mr. Oshio had already made another tape for April 28 in the series dealing with the situation in Korea, including Japanese responsibility for it. When this was rejected, a revised tape was submitted, to be broadcast on May 19. However, on that day, the station advised JBC that the tape would not be put on the air.

The JBC Central Committee expressed to the station its concern over this infringement of freedom of expression.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS in the Ministerial Qualifications Commission

Following the resignation of the previous Commission on Ministerial Qualifications, the Executive Committee named a new Commission. This Commission now faces the task of organizing and conducting examinations for candidates for the ministry in accord with the decision of the last Executive Committee that they should be conducted on the basis of the Kyodan Confession of Faith. The Commission is also bound by the earlier decision of the Executive Committee (April 14-15, 1976) that the examinations should be conducted in a reconciliatory spirit with regard to the views held by various candi-

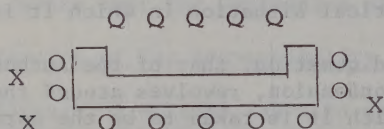
dates. (see KNL, March 20, 1976, No. 102)

The new Commission has met twice and has been able to draw up a blueprint of guidelines for conducting the examinations. It decided to have members of the Commission attend district assemblies being held this spring and also meet with candidates and those concerned with the theological seminaries to explain the content of the guidelines and hear their reactions before the Commission meets in June to make its final decision.

The Commission met in Tokyo on April 27 with re-

presentatives from six theological seminaries and three members of the Commission on the Ministry. The tentative guidelines were explained, questions raised, and opinions shared frankly among participants.

In order not to discourage those who left seminary during the struggles of five or six years ago and who have been gaining experience in work in pastorates, it is recommended that this year in giving the tests the distinction between those who have completed academic studies and those who have not be dropped.



TO SHARE THE PERSONAL ASPECTS OF THE DILEMMA, as it is experienced by those most deeply involved, below are sketches of a few of those attending the Tokyo hearings for ministerial candidates.

MR. YOSHIYUKI MATSUI, 45, a an evangelist with Reinanzaka Church, Tokyo, graduated from Japan Biblical Seminary after a career in business.

He wants the tests conducted as soon as possible because, without ordination, he cannot perform baptisms and communion, as requested by members of his church.

REV. CHIKARA TERADA, 45, graduated from Doshisha School of Theology and became a licensed pastor in 1962. But he has refused to take the ordination tests to protest the existence of two orders in the Kyodan, which he feels is meaningless in the Japanese situation.

A bill to revise the rules to establish one order will be presented by the Executive Committee to the next General Assembly.

"If you are going to eliminate one order, why are you giving two tests this year?"

he asked. "Because it is called for in the Kyodan's regulations, and we have been instructed to comply with them," was the Commission's reply.

MR. NOBUO KAINO, 28, serves as pastor of Fukagawa Church, Tokyo, although still a lay preacher. One of the students who left Tokyo Union Theological Seminary in the midst of the struggles in 1970, Kaino graduated from the Rikkyo University Department of Christian Studies.

He refuses to take the test until the Kyodan defines clearly what its position is on the Confession of Faith and why. He pursues the meaning, legitimacy and implications of the Executive Committee's move from the hozuru concept to kijun.*

MR. EIICHI ISHIKAWA, 31, assistant pastor of Yokohama Futatsubashi Church, is not a

licensed pastor yet--not by choice but because the tests have not been conducted in recent years. A graduate of Japan Biblical Seminary, he advocates holding the tests as soon as possible.

These are only a few of the people, and not necessarily representative of the whole. Within the group asking that tests be held soon were three positions: 1) hold them as soon as possible; 2) admit that the situation is not ideal but go ahead with them, not waiting until everything is solved; 3) conduct the tests as the Executive Committee instructed, letting those who want to take the tests do so, letting those who don't, wait.

These plus other reactions gleaned on visits in the districts will guide the Commission when it meets in June.

*See KNL Nos. 102-103, March and April, 1976 for discussion of terms